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**MONTANA RECOGNIZES THE VALUE OF TRAVEL**

**--WORLD TOURISM DAY CELEBRATED SEPTEMBER 27--**

(HELENA) Montana joins hundreds of destinations worldwide in recognition of World Tourism Day, an event held each year on September 27. Sanctioned by the U.N. World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the event provides an opportunity to look beyond borders and celebrate the unique opportunities created by travel and tourism.

“Montana certainly recognizes the economic value tourism brings to our state. But in a broader spectrum, tourism and travel allows us the opportunity to share with those beyond our borders what is so special about this place we are very fortunate to call home” said Governor Brian Schweitzer. “Montana is pleased to join the countless other locations around the world who are acknowledging the positive impact of travel in their communities.”

Tourism is not only an economic driver but it builds bridges culturally as well. According to recent research, those who have visited the U.S. are 74 percent more likely to have a favorable opinion of the country. Not only does travel foster more cultural understanding, but an international visitor is also valuable in that they spend more and stay longer than their U.S. counterparts.

In an effort to attract more international visitors to Montana, the state is currently hosting nearly 40 tour operators in our key European markets – the UK, Germany, France, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands, as well as several USA-based tour operators who sell trips to European tour operators. By attending familiarization (fam) tours, operators are able to experience Montana’s beauty, attractions and activities firsthand. The desired result of the trip would be that they will then provide additional Montana tour options to their clients, resulting in more European visitors to Montana.

The tour is a collaboration between Travel Montana's International Marketing program and the Montana suppliers who are hosting the tour operators. This provides a unique marketing opportunity for Montana companies to reach the European market. In turn, many suppliers are offering complimentary or reduced-rate rooms, meals and/or activities.

Travel is a critical resource in improving America's image around the world. It is also one of the United States' largest industries, directly employing 7.5 million people and generating tax revenues of about \$109 billion. It ranks fifth among the 20 major industry sectors measured by the U.S. Census Bureau. Travel expenditures within the U.S. total \$700 billion. Tourism globally set a new record in 2006, with 842 million arrivals worldwide, according to the UNWTO.

"Travel is a vital industry. Statewide, we welcome 10.4 million visitors each year who contribute \$2.9 billion in new money to our economy, but it's much more than a business" said Department of Commerce Director Tony Preite. "It's an opportunity to showcase Montana's spectacular natural landscape, our unique culture and our warm and gracious people."

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